

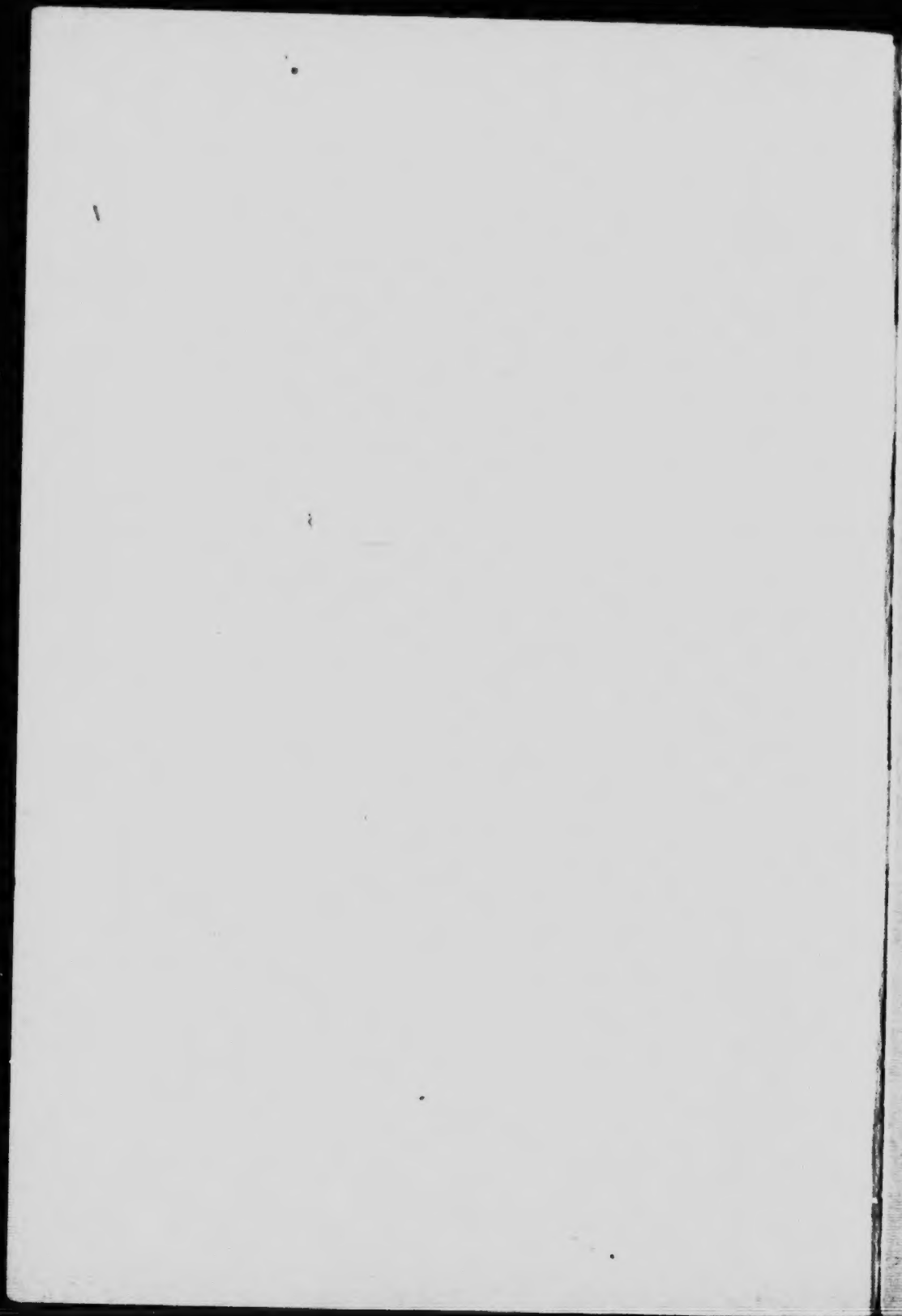
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The Struggle for Existence

by Gerald Diamond



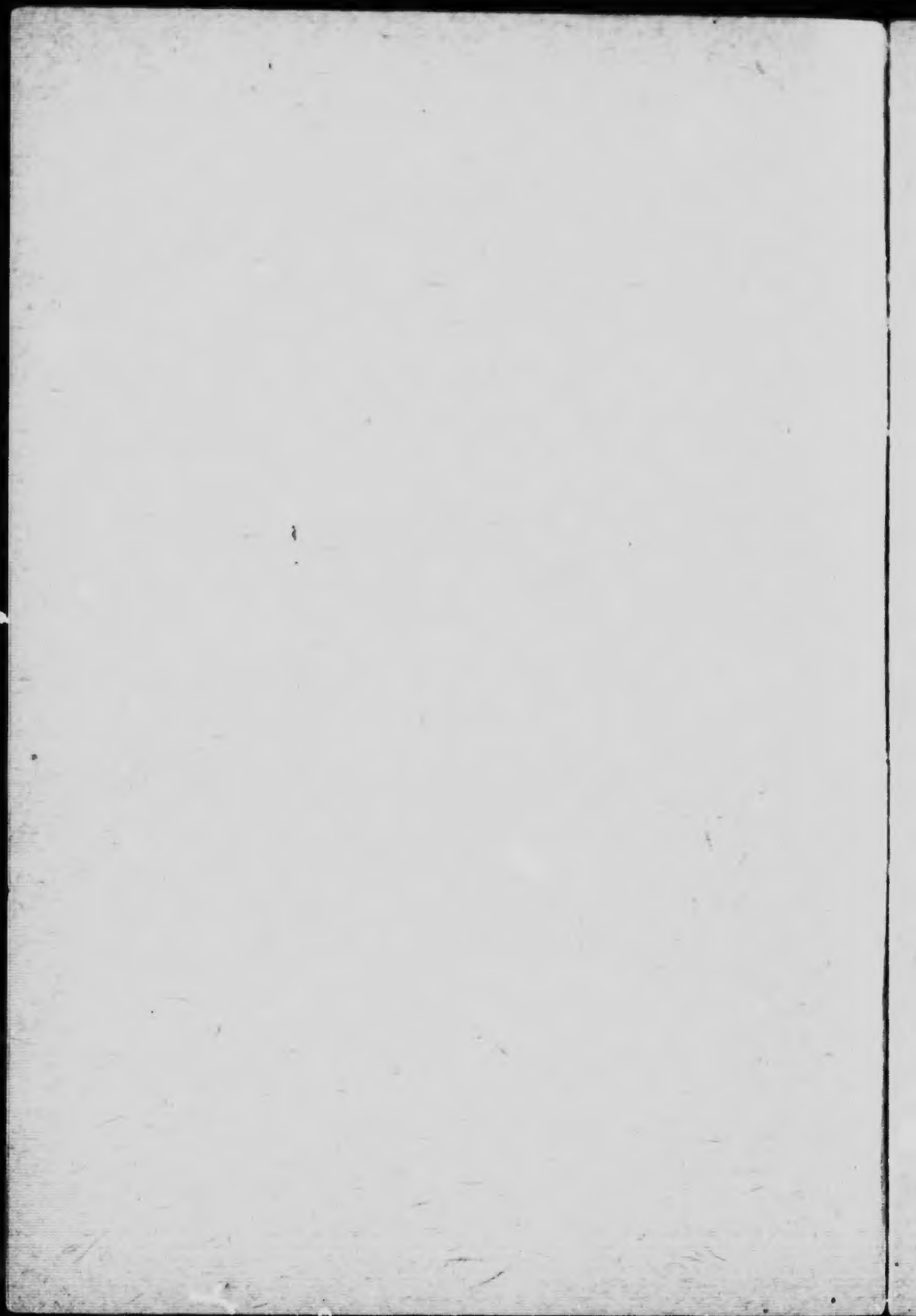
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The Struggle for Existence

by Gerald Desmond

Published by The Socialist Party
of Canada



THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

In the small space which is at our disposal, it is, of course, impossible to deal with this subject in as comprehensive or detailed a manner as could be desired. The most, indeed, that can be done is to sketch a broad outline. It will be our endeavor throughout to avoid, as far as possible, technical terms and phraseology while, at the same time, keeping as near as possible in line with the known scientific facts of evolution.

Struggle for Existence.

The history of the human race may be considered as the history of a struggle for existence. In using the words "history of the human race," we refer to what may be termed the real or fundamental history of the human race. The "histories," or so-called histories, with which most of us are more or less acquainted, by reason of our school-book lessons, can not be seriously considered by a student. We find, therein, in fact, nothing or next to nothing of real importance. These records of wars, great men, kings, queens, emperors, etc., do not in any sense make up the history of humanity. They can, at best, be regarded as affording us but momentary glances into the life of society—interesting to a certain extent, perhaps, but in reality of very little importance to us, as workers.

What is it then, that gives us the real story of the progress of the human race? This real history, as I before said is that of a struggle for existence—or, in other words, of a struggle to get those things which would enable us to live. The first thing necessary to support human life is food.

Man is an animal. He must eat to live. Cut him off from a food supply and he dies. The struggle for existence was, and even now is, therefore, primarily a struggle to get something to eat; although, in a larger sense, it may be said to have been and to be a struggle to obtain as large a portion as possible of the whole of whatever is produced.

It is not my intention in this little work to go very far back into the history of the human race, to endeavor to trace the descent of man, or to inquire into our relationship with the other members of the animal kingdom. Scientists, who have studied the question, are, it appears, almost unanimously of opinion that the human animal is merely a highly developed type, very closely related to other advanced types. An inquiry into this, however, does not come within our province at the present time.

The struggle for existence has been already presented as a struggle for the primary necessity of life—for food. Now food does not come to man without effort. We must go and find, procure or produce our food before we can eat. The same with clothing and shelter and all the many things we human animals need. They, too, have to be made or produced. The struggle for existence is therefore a struggle to produce—using the word produce in a sense of get, or obtain. The problem the human race have had to solve is, it follows, in the first place a problem of production.

Now it will be readily acknowledged that today society, or, to be more correct, the working classes can and do produce all that is required to satisfy their material needs. This is possible, because of the vast and wonderful machinery of production, (for production, as you will readily

see, depends upon tools or machines) which we have now. To understand how the problem of production has been solved we must briefly review the history of human development.

Hunting Animals.

Our savage ancestors were primarily a hunting people. They had no civilization, as we understand the word. Their mentality was limited. Their tools were crude. They had no written language. They lived on fish and game which they procured with rude hunting weapons, and such edible roots and berries as they could find. Their dwellings were caves and tree tops. The most important things to these hunting tribes were their hunting weapons. The first thing necessary to improve their condition, to make them more secure, to enable them to get a living easier, would be improved hunting weapons. The first inventions were probably along this line. Indeed, we can go further. We can say with certainty, on the evidences of primitive hunting weapons belonging to these distant periods, that the first improvement, or, if you refer to use the word, inventions, were in connection with hunting weapons. Each of these improvements being something which enabled these primitive ancestors of ours to obtain more food, or a better living, was something gained, was a victory won for them in their struggle for existence—was a step taken bringing them nearer to a solution of the problem of production.

Domestication of Animals.

Another great advance was made with the domestication of animals. It is hard to say exactly, when or how the lesson was learned that it was better or easier to keep animals in captivity, and

breed them for consumption, instead of allowing them to run wild and hunting them.

Agriculture.

A third momentous event was the discovery (if one may use that term) of agriculture. How this came about we can only assume. All we know is that, whereas, at one period we find the human race knowing apparently nothing of agriculture, we find them at another, and slightly later period, planting and in a rude way cultivating berry bushes and patches of tuberous roots. With the period in which the practice or knowledge of agriculture had become more or less common we find ourselves in a position which enables us to speak with greater accuracy and detail. The human race is now in a much better condition. It has, as we might say, got fairly started.

For a considerable period in history we have the major part of the human family devoting themselves principally to agricultural and pastoral pursuits. We find, as time goes on, larger areas of land coming under cultivation and tremendous numerical increases of the flocks and herds. Wealth at a certain period was reckoned in terms of so many cattle, sheep or goats, or so much corn. There are still a few interesting survivals of this era in existence in the shape of the nomadic tribes of Asia.

Commerce.

With the widening of human activity, the increasing of human desires—due to the greater productivity of the race we find commerce growing up. Earlier exchanges were probably confined to what may be, for simplicity's sake, called "natural" products. Certain countries, that is to say, would be more favorably situated for the

growth of certain grains or the pasturing of certain animals. Others would be better suited for other purposes. These facts would naturally lead to an interchange of these articles between such peoples, tribes, races or individuals.

Manufacture and Industry.

Manufacture and industry may be roughly considered as embracing the processes by which certain natural products of the earth (the term "natural products" is perhaps not scientifically correct here yet we use it for lack of a better) which in a crude or natural, shape and form are of no use are converted or changed by human effort into other and useful forms and shapes—forms and shapes, that is, rendering them suitable for human consumption or fitting them to supply some human need. Probably this can be best illustrated by a concrete example.

Take one of the "natural" resources of the earth, the mineral deposits. Iron ore in a crude state is no use to us. But by the application of labor power, that is to say, by "working it up"—it is transformed into useful articles. With the discovery or realization of the use, potentialities of iron ore would come, naturally enough, the desire to take advantage of these properties—to materialize these use potentialities through a certain process by the application of labor-power. This would of necessity result in the coming into existence of a certain section of the tribes, races or peoples who would devote themselves to this, and in the inauguration of what might be called a primitive industry—a thing which actually did happen. The same was true of other things, such as the processes which had for their object the turning of a "natural" product, wool into a manufactured article—a garment of some kind.

With the further development of human activity thought and intelligence, and the opening up of communication between different sections of the world, we find corresponding increases in the demand for manufactured articles, and, therefore, as a natural result, an increasing proportion of the people engaged in manufacturing or industrial pursuits.

The development of industry is a study of intense and engrossing interest. Let us examine industry for a few minutes. It appears that we can take two factors into consideration in the manufacture of articles. Of course we are aware that the great, **active** factor in all production is the **labor-power** of the workers, but it is not our province to discuss this here. Apart from labor-power and raw material we find two important things, machinery and motive power. The history of the development of industry is a history of improvements to machinery and lessons learnt tending toward and culminating in the discovery and utilization of more powerful motive forces.

In the beginning of the industrial era we find the machines or tools used in wealth production to have been very primitive and crude. They were, in fact, hand tools, operated or used by individual units of the human race.

Improvements in Machinery.

With the increasing demand for manufactured goods, however, these crude instruments or tools of production were unable to do the work and were superseded by others, capable of turning out or producing a greater number of articles. These later machines of production, being more complex, larger and heavier it naturally follows that great difficulty was experienced in operating them by hand. Various interesting experiments and

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devices to obtain a higher motive power than that represented by the muscular strength of the human unit were tried. We need only refer, in passing, to the use of animals, the utilization of running streams, and various instances of appliances on the same principle as our modern wind-mills.

Steam, Electricity, etc.

Perhaps the most momentous event in the history of production was the discovery of steam and its utilization as a motive power. Hand labor and individual production is now doomed, and industrial machinery hereafter develops with almost bewildering rapidity; a process still further accelerated by the discovery and utilization of electric power. The more recent developments are, in outline at least, known to all of us, and it is needless to examine them in detail.

With the twentieth century the problem of production may be said to be a problem no longer. It has been solved. It has been solved by the machine. We have reviewed the history of our race from its infancy. We have seen the battle of life won so far as production is concerned. Man, if we may say it so, has conquered nature. And yet, for us of the working class, there can be no ceasing in the struggle. We can claim no victory. A second fight yet remains to be fought, a second phase of the struggle for existence—a struggle of master and man, of slave and slave-owner, the modern class struggle.

Man Against Man.

Just as individual struggle or warfare implies individuals fighting or struggling for supremacy, so class struggles imply hostile and struggling classes. To have a class struggle in the world

we must have a society divided along class lines. In examining the early communal organizations we find no class struggle. This was because they knew no class divisions. Of tribal or clan war they knew something, but this was all.

These primitive clans or tribes afford us a glimpse of a crude social organization in which practically the whole of the tribe or clan were producers. With the possible exception of a kind of priestly cult or craft we find each and every individual capable of doing so taking part in hunting, fishing and other tribal pursuits. The division of the product was conducted, roughly speaking, on the principle of distributing or giving to the various individuals composing the clan enough to satisfy his or her needs.

Primitive Communism Unmarked by Slavery.

Primitive communism is, so far as we can learn, unmarked by any form of class slavery or servitude. This may be considered to be due to the fact that hunting and fishing—the principle ways of getting a living—were pursuits in which the employment of slaves or captive workers would have been, for obvious reasons, a matter of great difficulty, if not of absolute impossibility. The communal clans sometimes took prisoners in their tribal wars, and, doubtless, if they could have seen any way to make anything out of these captives they would have done so. As it was, however, no such way being open to them, it appears, generally served them (the prisoners) as the piece de resistance at a cannibal banquet.

First Class Struggle.

Class struggles commenced with the introduction of slavery. Slavery came as soon as it could—with the discovery and practice of agriculture and the breeding and domestication of ani-

mals. Then it was possible for captives to be profitably employed—that is to say for them, if made to work for the captors, to produce more than they consumed, or than it took to keep them alive. The first slaves were undoubtedly captives taken in war and employed in the cultivation of the soil and in the tending of their conquerors' flocks and herds. Indeed, it may be remarked that for quite a considerable time we find no mention or record of individuals being the slaves of other individuals belonging to the same clan. The members of these closely-knit organizations did not endeavor at first, to enslave their clan brothers and exploit him—unlike the modern captain of industry who, as we are well aware, is always ready to employ and exploit his compatriots, granted, of course, that they can be procured as cheaply as those of some other nationality.

With the coming of slavery and the keeping of slaves, however, the old tribal organizations could not long stand. The keeping of slaves necessitated the creation of slave guards. Before this time the whole of the able-bodied members of the tribe took part in warfare, on the necessity arising, as they did in hunting and fishing. Such a thing as a standing army, or permanent fighting force, was unknown—there was no necessity for it. Permanent or standing armed forces, then, came into being with slavery. The function of such forces was primarily to keep the slaves in subjection and protect the interest of the slave-owning section. Slavery, as we have been said, spelled the death knell of the old communities. The benefits to be gained by a master through the utilization of slave labor were too apparent to be long overlooked. Soon we find individuals not only holding as slaves aliens captured in war but, also, members of their own

tribe or clan. Before this further step could be taken, however, something was necessary.

Private Property in the Land and Tools of Production.

At an early period the land and the primitive tools of production were to all intents and purposes held in common. Private ownership was unknown. We are informed that the word "my," or its equivalent, was not used in describing ownership, but the word "our." Under such a system with free access to the means of life, great difficulty was experienced, by primitive captains of industry, in enslaving the people. This was overcome by the seizure of the land and tools by a few powerful individuals, and the parcelling of it out amongst them. Thus, at an early date, we find the great mass of the people enslaved and a class society in existence; composed on the one hand of the dispossessed majority and on the other of those who had seized the means of life and established themselves thereby in a position of owner or overlordship. This was done by the aid of the newly established armed forces on the one hand and the priestly craft on the other. The rulers, we find, succeeded in attaching these two sections to their side by according to them various gifts and privileges—paid out of the goods produced by the slaves of course. In return for these favors the armed forces upheld the overlordship at the point of the sword, while the priest craft performed an equally important function, playing upon the people's superstitions and inculcating into the minds of the newly enslaved various servile principles—meekness, humility, contentment, resignation, self-denial—which they expounded with fervor but which, then as now, they showed no particularly noticeable tendency

to practise. All this, of course, was not accomplished in a day nor without violent upheavals, rebellions and disturbances. Some interesting survivals are yet with us, particularly in Asiatic Russia, of peoples who have hardly emerged from communism.

Chattel Slavery.

The first form of slavery was that which we call chattel slavery. Briefly stated we mean that the workers were the absolute property of the masters—chattels—to be bought, sold, exchanged, etc. This, of course, meant that the master had to feed, clothe and shelter the slave out of what the slave produced. The amount of the wealth produced by the slaves, less the amount deducted to keep them alive and in good working condition, approximated to the profit of the modern capitalist. The amount of food it took to keep the slave may be said, loosely speaking, to approximate to the modern worker's "wage." Of course we are aware that the form of payment—in the one case in food, etc., and in the other in their monetary equivalent—is different, yet we maintain that in essence or substance the thing is the same.

Serfdom.

Later on we find chattel slavery giving way to feudal serfdom. This change was made, in our opinion, partly because, owing to the widespread dissatisfaction among a certain portion of the slave class, it became necessary to make apparent concessions, but, primarily, because feudal slavery, or feudalism, was a better (more profitable) form of exploitation than chattel slavery. Under the feudal system we see that the master no longer has resting upon him the onus of bother-

ing with the feeding of the slave. At this time the workers were bound to the land. A certain section of arable land was the property of feudal lords. A part (in all cases the richest and most productive soil) he retained for his own use, and it was cultivated by his serfs for a certain period, generally three days out of six. The resultant product went to the feudal lord. Other sections of land were set aside for cultivation by the serfs. Whatever they produced thereon was their own. It may be said, in passing, however, that in actual practice what they produced, supposedly for themselves they did not always enjoy. The feudal serfs were always the prey to various "side grafts." Particularly is this true with our old friends of the priestly craft. They were allowed by the feudal lord to exact a heavy toll on the already scanty and meagre product of the serf. Under feudalism we have society divided roughly into two classes—feudal lords and serfs. We find in this period the strengthening of the armed forces going on apace.

Some of us have, perhaps, in our boyhood days, read enthralling romances dealing with the "good old times" of the bold baron and his retainers. Probably such accounts are more or less exaggerated. Still, there is no doubt that the feudal nobility lived exceedingly well, and had a good time—at the serfs' expense. The history of feudalism is marked by many bloody encounters, revolt and rebellions. Time and time again the serfs, driven to desperation, throwing caution to the winds, struck back at the feudal lords. As a general rule there was little intelligence behind these insurrections, although it is interesting to note that in some cases they seemed to have had an inkling of what they wanted—free access to the means of life. In most cases the serfs, ill-

armed, ill-clad, undisciplined, ignorant, got the worst of these encounters from the start. At times they enjoyed a little success and many a lordly castle went up in flames while its inmates died in various unpleasant ways

A New System.

Feudalism, however, ran its course, and a new system sprang up. A new class forced its way to the front and made a bold bid for supremacy. This was the trading or bourgeois class. The history of this class is practically a history of modern industrial development.

The fore-runner of the present ruling and owning class were the small traders of free cities. These acquired wealth by their operations, and grasped at power. With the growth of industrial life and manufacture they eventually became the dominant factor. With the decay of feudalism the feudal serfs were forced from the land and into the rising commercial centres of modern civilization. The power of the nobility decayed. This new system of slavery which we have with us to-day brought no great amelioration or bettering of the condition of the great mass of the people—the "freed serfs." To them it was but an exchange of masters. The tools of production speedily became so costly, with the development of capitalism, that their acquisition by the workers was practically impossible. The ownership concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. Under capitalism the tools of production may be said to take the place of the land under feudalism—to represent the things to which the workers must have access to live. These tools of production being at present in the hands of a small class in society the modern "free" workers are forced to depend upon this class for access to them. The

power thus placed in the hands of the owners enable them to exploit the workers. The average worker must toil for wages and be exploited—or quit work and starve.

Wage-Slavery.

Let us say, however, that this particular system—wage-slavery—is a more dangerous, subtle and misleading form than any other that has preceded it. The peculiarity of this system is that the modern worker is apparently not a slave. This is due to the much-vaunted freedom of contract of which we hear so much. Freedom of contract means that the modern wage-worker is not by law bound to any particular unit or section of the present owning class. However, since the whole of the means of life at the present time (natural resources, machinery, etc.), are in the hands of the capitalist class, it appears to us that this much-vaunted freedom of contract must be regarded merely as a joke—a somewhat grim and unpleasant one for the worker, indeed—and cannot be taken seriously. The modern wage worker is in substantially the same position as the slave workers which have preceded him—divorced from the means of life—with the exception of that, whereas, the chattel slave was bound to a definite master and the feudal serfs tied to a certain piece of land, we have no fixed owner, but are given the doubtful privilege of, at times, changing our masters. It may be said, in objection to this position, that the modern worker receives wages, and is therefore “free.” This, however, is beside the case. The chattel slave received wages also (using the term roughly) in the shape of his keep, and, upon analysis, we find that the money wage of to-day is merely the monetary expression of our “keep.” Indeed, the position of the modern worker is

worse than that of the chattel slave, in that the wage of the modern worker represents, on the average, a much less proportion of the wealth he produces than the goods handed to the chattel slave for consumption represented the wealth produced by that slave. The relative or comparative reward of the wage worker is therefore less than that of the chattel slave. Capitalism is essentially a system of slavery because of the ownership of the tools of production by the capitalist class and the exploitation of the workers.

The Struggle Must Continue.

With the working class of to-day dispossessed, enslaved and exploited we cannot say that for us the struggle for existence is at an end. The problem of production is undoubtedly solved. The existence of a vast and complex industrial machinery which can, and does, produce a sufficiency to satisfy the needs of all does not help us much unless we get the goods. The fact that the workers produce these goods, do the work, tend the machines, is a negative kind of satisfaction if they do not receive a reward equivalent to the resultant product. The problem of distribution yet remains to be solved. We freely admit that so far as the ruling class of to-day is concerned this problem may already be considered as "solved" in a very satisfactory manner. They, numerically a small part of the whole, get the great bulk of the wealth produced—and, at that, generally, without taking any part in the production of the wealth. This solution, while alright for the owners however, cannot be regarded as at all satisfactory to the workers. The problem of distribution is not to us, a question of distribution of the goods anywhere or anyhow but of distributing them so that we get approximately value returned for what we do.

Any such distribution of the wealth produced is, of course, utterly impossible to slaves. No class or section of slave workers have ever received what they produced—or ever will. They get, on the whole, enough to keep them going and no more. If the working class desire to get what they produce they must abolish slavery. This they can only do by abolishing the class ownership of the means of production. Such a step means political revolution, the overthrow of the present ruling class, the collective ownership of the means of life and their democratic management by the workers. For these things the Socialist Party of Canada stands and for that alone. Its programme is that of the revolutionary working class. We call upon the workers to educate themselves to their true position and organize with us for the overthrow of capitalism by the capture of the powers of the State—upon which the capitalist ownership depends—in order that we may take over the machinery of production, and that economic servitude and exploitation may come to an end.

GERALD DESMOND.

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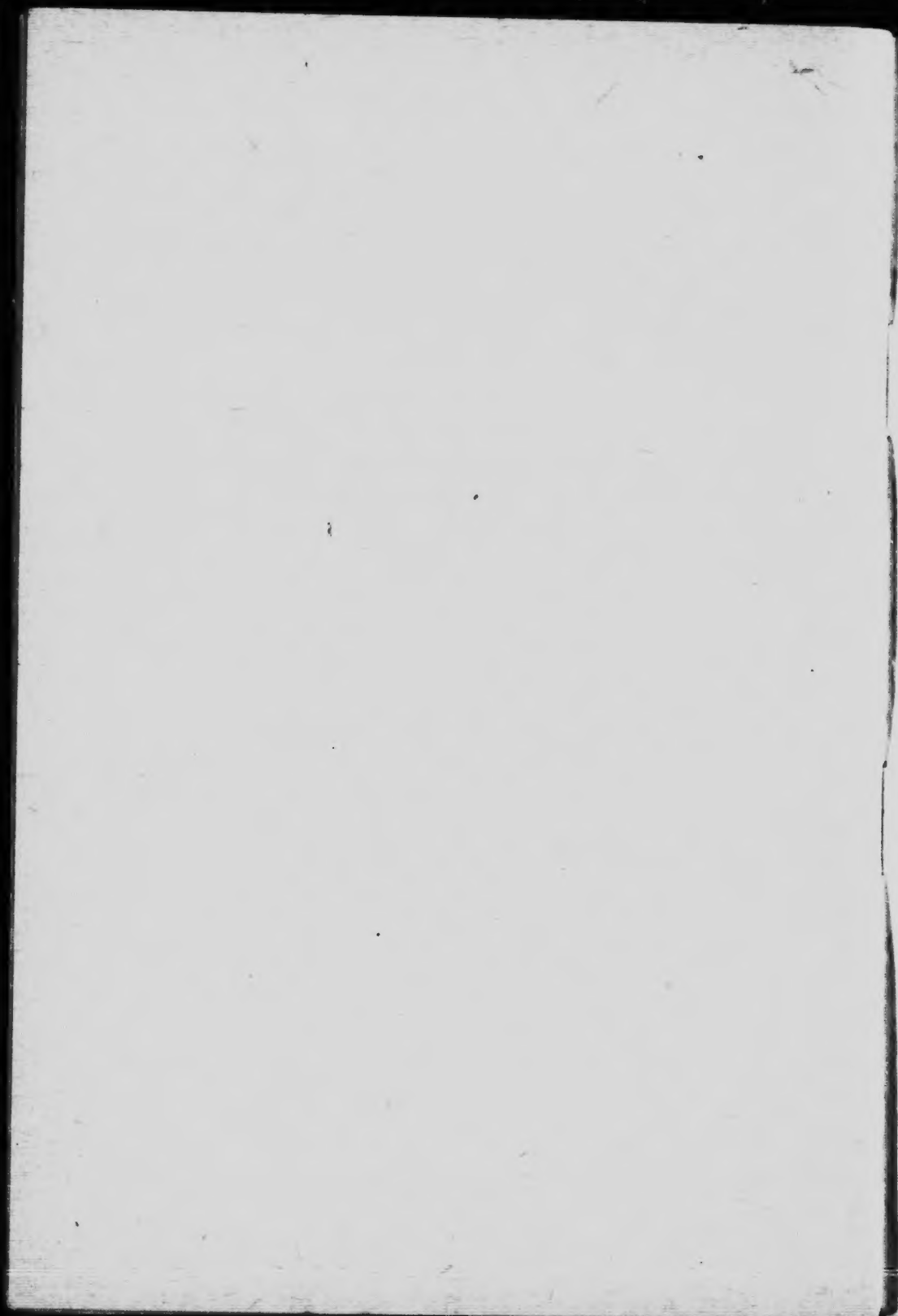
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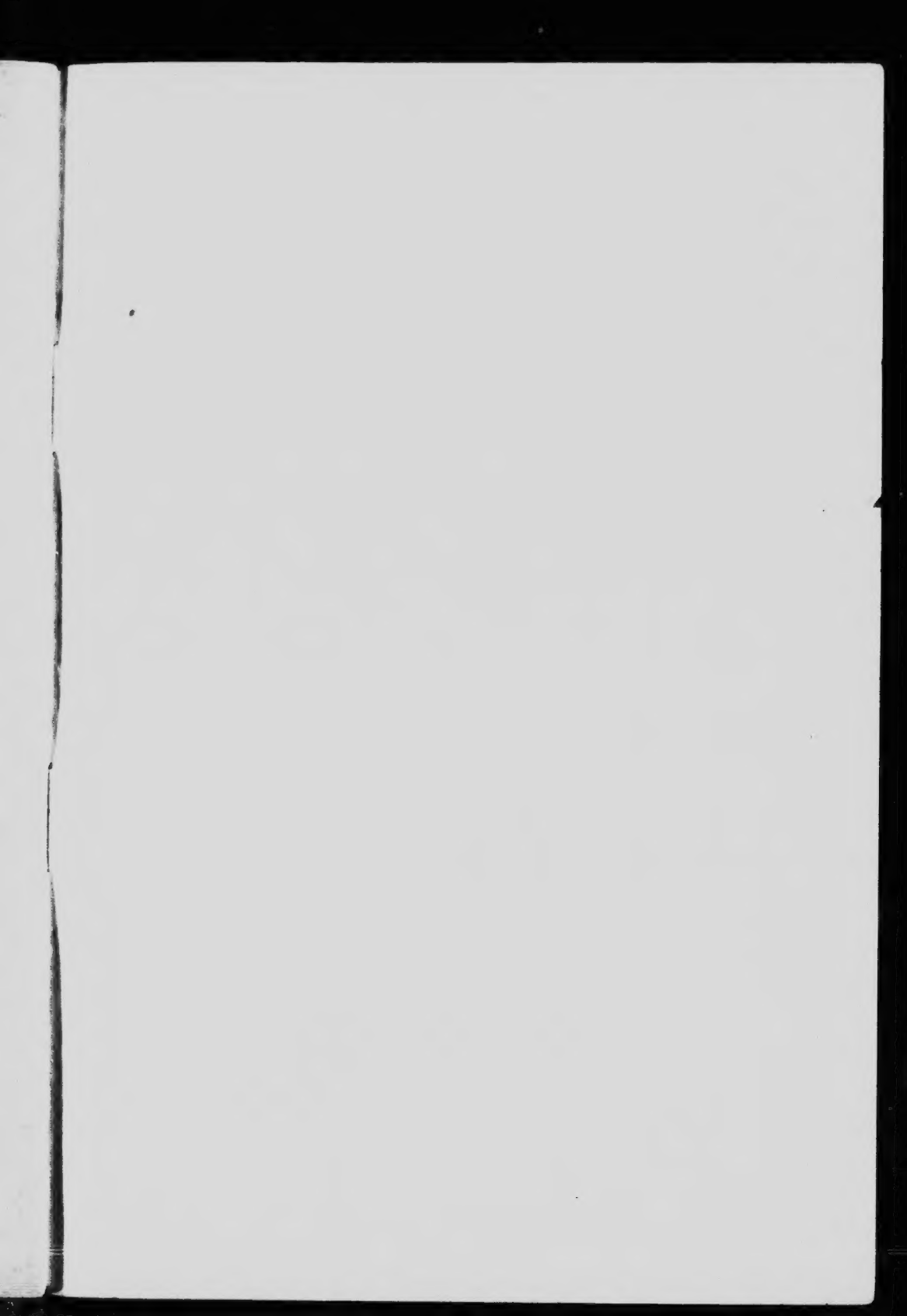
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